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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [BE](#)  
SUBJECT: BELGIUM'S COOL RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON PRESERVING  
LEBANESE PM SINIORA'S GOVERNMENT

REF: SECSTATE 172274

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR THEODORE H ANDREWS, REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D)

11. (C) In response to ref A demarche, Belgian FM De Gucht's Deputy Chief of Staff for Middle East Affairs, Jean-Luc Bodson, told us the MFA could not agree with the USG request about dealing with the Syrians. Bodson explained that the Belgians thought the U.S. approach would be "counterproductive" on a number of points. First, according to Bodson, Belgium's ambassador (NFI) had arrived recently in Damascus and had yet to have developed the type of relationships needed to make points that could be perceived as "accusations without proof." Doing so might undercut his future effectiveness. Second, Bodson said while Belgium did not have "good" relations with the Syrians, "we do have better relations than you" which Belgium could usefully maintain as such, for potential future use. Bodson added that Belgian diplomats in Damascus had been alerted to the matters raised in ref a, and to the need to raise such issues with Syrian counterparts. Poloff reiterated that it was important to raise the issue of any disturbances that started in Beirut with Syrian officials.

12. (C) The MFA's desk officer for Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, Hendrik Van De Velde, told us separately that Belgium's ambassador in Beirut had reported along lines that paralleled information conveyed in ref A. However, the Ambassador's information had not been as specific as ours.

EU FISSURES ON LEBANON  
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13. (C) Taken aback at the request to demarche Syria, Van de Velde asked whether the U.S. was raising the matter also with the EU's CFSP High Representative Solana. Explaining that the EU was the usual forum where Belgium discussed and decided its positions on issues like the Middle East, our MFA contact noted the EU member states normally found it difficult to reach a common position on Syria and Lebanon. France generally refused to deal with Assad because of President Chirac's close relationship with the late Prime Minister Hariri. Belgium was also in a sensitive position because of Belgian Serge Brammertz' role in investigating Hariri's murder. Because of Brammertz' job, the Belgians feared Syria would believe Brussels had ulterior motives when it raised Lebanon-related issues. In an aside, Van de Velde noted that some unspecified parties in the international community hoped Brammertz would take part in the Hariri case whenever it went to trial. For his part, Brammertz reportedly wanted to accept a position to become a member of the International Tribunal at The Hague.

14. (C) Referring to Spanish FM Moratinos' recent visit to Damascus, Van de Velde commented that Spain's approach was at the other end of the EU scale from France. The Belgian embassy in Madrid reported that Moratinos did not "get much" from Assad during his visit. Despite this disappointment, the Spaniard planned to make more trips to Damascus in the future.

Comment

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15. (C) Bodson is new to his position and, not surprisingly, echoed the MFA's traditional cautious line on Middle East issues. Given this attitude, and given the fact of a new ambassador in Damascus and the delicate position of Serge Brammertz, we must recognize that Belgium is in a sensitive position. We will have to work carefully whenever we want them to stick their necks out. Imbrie

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